The diffusion of English absolutes: A diachronic register study

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Abstract

The present paper addresses the register diffusion of the English absolute, a non-finite construction functioning as an adverbial (an example from Present day-English is: *One of the cheap cigars to which she was addicted burns ignored between her fingers, the skin of her face dragging down with indifference.* (BNC, Van Gogh: a life, 1990)) On the basis of diachronic corpus research including corpora such as the BNC, the Old Bailey corpus and the Penn parsed corpora of English it is argued that the distribution of absolutes in various historical registers of written English, as well as in spoken English appears to have shifted from a system operating along the 'formal vs. informal' cline and, to a lesser extent, the 'narrative vs. non-narrative' cline in Early Modern English to registers operating along the 'literary vs. non-literary' cline in Present-day English. Special attention is given to the role of *with*-augmentation which may have been an important facilitator for the absolute construction to fully establish itself in the spoken register, as the addition of an augmentor enhances ease of processing (Berent 1975, Kortmann 1995).

1. Introduction[1]

The present paper addresses the diffusion of the absolute construction (AC), a non-finite construction which functions as an adverbial, in various historical registers of written English, as well as in spoken English. Synchronic and diachronic accounts of the AC to date (Ross 1893, Quirk et al. 1985, Kortmann 1991, 1995, Timofeeva 2010) have commonly made reference to register, but detailed discussions of the distribution of the AC across (historical) registers are lacking, nor have relevant claims been based on (extensive) corpus research (a notable exception is Kohnen 2004; see below). This paper, then, wishes to contribute to present scholarship on the AC by providing a corpus-based, diachronic study of the (changing) distribution of English ACs across a range of text types and with a focus on the Modern English (ModE) and Present-day English (PDE) period. The broader theoretical interest of this paper lies in the fact that the distribution of ACs appears to have shifted from registers operating along the 'formal vs. informal' cline (in EModE) to registers operating along the 'literary vs. non-literary' cline (in PDE).

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Section 2 introduces the AC's structural and semantic characteristics. Section 3 presents a survey of current scholarship on the diffusion of the AC, as a run-up to the research questions in Section 4. After a discussion of data and methodology in Section 5, Section 6 presents the main findings of the study. Finally, Section 7 provides a brief conclusion.

2. An introduction to the absolute construction

The AC (in English), as in (1), is a non-finite construction which is syntactically independent from the rest of the clause.[2] It consists of two core elements: a (pro)nominal subject (e.g. *his white cloak*) and a predicate (e.g. *snapping*) (Bauer 2000: 261), which can be realized in a number of ways (cf. infra). Although definitions of the AC often mention the absence of any coreferentiality between the subject of the AC and an element of the matrix clause, coreferentiality does occur rather frequently (e.g. the relation between *his white cloak* and *Jaime*) (Kortmann 1995: 211–213).

(1) *Jaime turned his horse about, his white cloak snapping in the wind*. (George R.R. Martin. 2005. *A Feast for Crows*, p. 185)[3]

Two main subtypes of ACs can be distinguished (see Kortmann 1991: 11): the augmented AC, which is introduced by the prepositions *with* or *without*, as in (2), and the unaugmented AC, not introduced by a preposition (see Kortmann 1991: 11), as in (1) and (3), and considered to be more prototypical.[4] The preposition introducing augmented ACs is called the augmentor. In PDE, *with(out)* is the only commonly used augmentor; however, in Middle English and to some extent still in ModE, various other augmentors were still available such as *after*, *before* or *by reason of*, as illustrated in (4) (see Visser 1973).

(2) ***With** Stannis Baratheon and Tyrion Lannister contending for the iron Throne, we have a rare chance to improve our lot.* (George R.R. Martin. 2005. *A Feast for Crows*, p. 185.)

(3) *He had died in her arms, his life's blood drenching her*. (George R.R. Martin. 2005. *A Feast for Crows*, p. 234.)

(4) *Then the Clerk of the Arraigns **after** Silence commanded read over his Indictment to him, which was as follows:...* (PPCMBE, The genuine trial of Francis Townley, late of Manchester, 1746)

[2] Hence also its name, which has been derived from the Latin verb *absolvere* 'to untie, to loosen'.
[3] Some of the examples are taken from sources other than the corpora employed.
[4] In the sense that the unaugmented variant is historically the oldest and most frequent of the two (van de Pol 2010).

ACs can occur with a wide range of different predicate types, the most common being present (5) or past (6) participles (Kortmann 1995: 195). Other types are: perfective participles (7), noun/noun phrases (8), adjective/adjectival phrases (9), adverb/adverbial phrases (10), prepositional phrases (11), or even infinitives (12) (Kortmann 1995: 195). Although several researchers have chosen to focus on ACs with present and/or past participle predicates (e.g Río-Rey 2002, Killie & Swan 2009), the current study will take all types under consideration (which will allow examining whether particular predicate types are connected to particular text varieties).

(5) *When the images are combined into a single shot, everyone will appear to be fighting together, with the dwarves **coming up** only to around the elves' elbows.* (http://www.richardarmitagenet.com/images/articlescans/Hobbit/EW-3Jul12-2.jpg, accessed 13 July 2012)

(6) *With the ducklings **caught** between the reeds, we should be able to pick them up.* (Animal Cops, Animal Planet, 9 March 2012)

(7) *They were in a private room, the doctor **having told** her that she needed to wait a while longer before she could give birth.* (http://www.fanfiction.net/s/6192919/1/Memory_Album, published 30 July 2010, accessed 30 May 2012)

(8) *He was scrawny and ill fed, his only armor **a dinted halfhelm spotted with rust***. (George R.R. Martin. 2005. *A Feast for Crows*, p. 315)

(9) *With the internet so readily **available**, there is no excuse for not researching BEFORE adopting a pet.* (http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/articles/breedersvsrescues.htm, accessed 17 February 2012)

(10) *Now with the monsoon season **over**, and several more boatloads of Cambodians reported on their way by Indonesian officials, Australian immigration authorities are preparing for yet another major influx of refugees.* (BNC, Independent Television News, period 1985–1994)

(11) *Brienne stood beneath the gallows, the precious parchment **in her hand**.* (George R.R. Martin. 2005. *A Feast for Crows*, p. 235)

(12) *Each man was required to buy into the contest with a golden dragon, the whole sum **to go** to whoever claimed her maidenhead*. (George R.R. Martin. 2005. *A Feast for Crow*, p. 238)

Semantically, ACs can express a wide range of relations with the matrix clause, similar to the range of meanings that can be expressed by finite (subordinate) adverbial clauses (Berent 1973: 147, Stump

1985: 3, Haspelmath 1995: 27, Komen 1994: 11, Kortmann 1995: 215–217).[5] Examples are: anteriority (13), cause (14), condition (15) and concession (16).

(13) *With Sammy settled down, Cesar brings him face to face with his greatest nemesis.* (Dogwhisperer, National Geographic Channel, 3 March 2012)

(14) *The kidney being a discrete organ, there was every chance that the cancer had been contained.* (BNC, Fighting cancer: A personal story, 1989)

(15) *With the Family giving more attention, I think Peanut Butter will be a much happier dog*. (It's me or the Dog, Animal Planet, 24 January 2009)

(16) *But even with a lifebelt on, one is not unaware of the ocean around.*[6] (BNC, Fighting cancer: A personal story, 1989)

In addition, ACs may express a semantic relation of elaboration, without any clearly identifiable adverbial relation being present, as in (17). This use is especially common in PDE (see van de Pol & Cuyckens 2013).

(17) *She has committed several sins, greed and gluttony being high on the list*. (BNC, In good faith, 1989)

3. Earlier studies

As we have pointed out above, earlier accounts of the distribution of the AC across (historical) registers in English have been partial at best: some are synchronic (as such, Quirk et al. 1995 and Kortmann 1991, 1995 examine PDE data, while Timofeeva 2010 looks into the AC in Old English), some only consider a restricted set of text types (Kortmann 1991, 1995), and some present claims not based on extensive corpus research (Ross 1893). The most detailed, diachronic register study of the AC to date is Kohnen (2004), but it is embedded in a more comprehensive analysis of participial constructions, so it is not always possible to isolate results pertaining only to the AC.

Still, these accounts have raised an important issue, which will be of further interest in this paper. It concerns the main factor determining the token frequency of ACs across text types, in particular, whether AC frequency is determined by the degree of 'formality' of a text (or of the situation in which the text occurs) or by its 'narrative' or'depictive character' (each of these notions will be defined in Section 4).

[5] Often, the AC is semantically indeterminate, whereby its exact interpretation is largely context-dependent (and to some extent up to the reader/listener).

[6] Note that when an augmented AC expresses concessional meaning, the augmentor is often *even with* rather than *with*.

It has been pointed out on several occasions that it is formal text types that are the province of the AC. As such, Quirk et al. (1985: 1120), whose scope is restricted to PDE, state that ACs are formal and infrequent. Ross, in his (1893) study on ACs in Middle and Modern English, views ACs – at least until 1660 – as markers of a "classical, learned, scholastic style" (1893: 273). Similar observations are made by Kohnen (2004: 352), who draws attention to the importance of the formality of text types for the development of ACs (from Middle English onwards).[7] Finally, ACs in Old English are considered by many scholars to be a borrowing from Latin (see, for instance, Callaway 1889, 1918, Kisbye 1971: 27, 72, Sato 2009: 9, Sørensen 1957: 141, Ross 1893: 260 and Timofeeva 2008, 2010, 2012), and thus likely to be used by learned people and/or contexts of formal, learned writing.[8] An additional factor contributing to ACs' formal character in Old English is that they are clearly more common in translations from Latin than in native texts (van de Pol 2010).[9]

This characterization of ACs as largely a feature of formal language use has, however, been qualified. As such, König & van der Auwera (1990: 349) have claimed that "[a]ugmented ACs (i.e. those introduced by *with/avec*) are very common even in informal registers of English and French". In a similar vein, Kortmann has noted that *with*-ACs are "stilistisch weniger markiert" (less stylistically marked) (1988: 69) than their unaugmented counterparts. It would appear, then, that register restrictions that are in place for the unaugmented variant do not necessarily hold for the augmented variant.

Rather than degree of formality determining the distribution of ACs across registers, it has been advocated, for one by Kortmann (1995: 191), "that it is the depictive versus nondepictive distinction which is relevant to the token frequency of free adjuncts and ACs among written registers, and not the distinction between formal and informal discourse". In particular, Kortmann's (1991) study of PDE ACs (and free adjuncts) finds that "[i]n written language the frequency of their use decreases proportionally to an increase of the formality of the text type. Thus, narrative texts are found to abound in them, whereas scientific writing displays the lowest frequency rate of adjuncts and absolutes" (1991: 2). In short, a high frequency of ACs is found to be associated with text types that are more elaborate and narrative in nature and add ample background information and extra detail to the main message of the text.[10] Interestingly, ACs' narrative and depictive function is not solely a

[7] In this respect, he points out that it is no coincidence that it is text types such as religious prose and petitions/laws where ACs first occur, which derive their formal status from their ecclesiastical or worldly power and influence (Kohnen 2004: 352–353).

[8] Even if ACs in Old English are not considered a true borrowing from Latin, the fact remains that they occur in contexts of learned writing, which lends them their formal character.

[9] This does not mean that ACs in native OE texts are informal. As Timofeeva (2010: 73) points out: "It seems obvious that most of the A[bsolute]P[articipial]C[onstruction]s that we find in the independent O[ld] E[nglish] texts, in fact, show some dependence on the wider Latinate context of the medieval literary production."

[10] Note that, while involving corpus research, Kortmann's results are based on a limited set of data: 269 ACs from only four text types (fiction, news, science and spoken English), with some samples lacking representativeness. The results for the 'science' text type, for example, are based on four excerpts from one and the same book on conditionals (Kortmann 1991: note on texts).

feature of PDE, but has also been shown to be present in ModE. As Ross (1893: 302) points out, "In the second period, extending from1660 to the present time, the construction [i.e., the AC] becomes naturalized ... and its sphere is largely narrowed to that of narration and description". Additional support comes from Kohnen's (2004: 151, 248) summarizing diagrams of the evolution of the AC across text types.

4. Research questions

As was mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this paper is to provide a corpus-based, diachronic study of the (changing) distribution of English ACs across a range of registers and with a focus on the Modern English (ModE) and Present-day English (PDE) period. Previous studies have raised the issue of the factor(s) determining this distribution across registers, but answers have been incomplete as well as inconclusive (see Section 3). The research questions that we intend to address, then, are the following.

1. We first wish to identify the factor(s) that best predict the distribution of ACs across registers. In particular, in view of the literature (as surveyed above), we will examine whether this distribution is determined by (i) degree of formality of the discourse (and more specifically whether high/low formality corresponds with high/low AC frequency or, conversely, with low/high frequency), by (ii) its narrative character, or (iii) by its literary (largely depictive) character. In addition, we will explore whether these factor(s)/dimensions remain(s) stable or shift(s) over time. Stability is suggested, for instance, by Kisbye's (1971: 43) description of the AC construction as limited to set phrases in language use. A shift from formal to informal registers is proposed by Kohnen (1996: 186), who points out the following about present participle constructions (including ACs):

> *Standardisierung scheint sich nicht nur in, sondern auch über Textsorten zu vollziehen: Im vorliegenden Fall deutet vieles darauf hin, daß die Expansion von "oben" nach "unten" geht, also bei formellen, prestigehaltigen Textsorten beginnt und dann bei informelleren Textsorten fortschreitet.*
>
> 'It seems that standardization does not only take place within certain text types but also across different text types. In the case under investigation there are many signs that show that the expansion spreads from "high" to "low". In other words, the expansion begins in formal, prestigious text types and then gradually finds its way into more informal varieties.'

Then again, if Present-day English ACs appear to fit in best with more narrative or depictive types of discourse, regardless of whether they are formal or informal (as is proposed by

Kortmann 1991: 2, 1995: 191), this is suggestive of a shift in determining factors (from a register distribution determined by degree of formality to one determined by degree of narrativeness or depictiveness). Consider, for instance, PDE examples (18) and (19), which, irrespective of whether their surrounding discourse is formal or informal, occur in a narrative/depictive context, with an attention for detail and where the AC provides additional context and depth.

(18) *To provide a place within your tradition where a candle may be lit, not for magic but for memory, its flickering flame symbolising the frailty of human life, its warmth communicating the mercy of God's love, its light illuminating the dark night of despair*. (BNC, In good faith, 1989)

(19) *Creatures often seem to have gone out of their way to find him and display themselves to him. Yet the hunter, walking with gun on arm, thoughts only of killing and murder in his mind and his intent clearly expressed in his body language, is shunned in fear by all creatures who can.* (BNC, Natural creation & the formative mind, 1991)

2. We wish to explore the register distribution of augmented versus unaugmented ACs. This will allow us to establish whether there exists a correlation between the frequency of augmented ACs in a text and the register category the text belongs to. In particular, we would like to verify whether it is indeed the augmented variant that has gained most ground in spoken English, as is suggested by König & van der Auwera (1990: 349; see above).
3. Finally, we wish to identify the register distribution of individual predicate types, as a way to find out whether particular registers attract particular AC subtypes. In addition, this will allow us to examine which registers display the highest structural AC variety.

In examining the distribution of ACs across text types, we are regarding text types as register categories, and the occurrence of ACs as a register feature. This register perspective on text types is justified by the fact that our textual focus is on text excerpts (rather than whole texts), and that we are viewing ACs as a lexicogrammatical feature whose frequency reflects the extent to which it marks a situational context (e.g. formal discourse) or to which it serves a communicative purpose (e.g. narrative function) (cf. Biber & Conrad 2009: 16, 151).[11]

[11] Biber & Conrad (2009: 16) distinguish the register perspective of text types with the genre and style perspective. The genre perspectiveis defined as the study of linguistic characteristics that are used to structure complete texts and often occur only once in a text; these characteristics are often conventional rather than functional. The style perspective focuses on lexicogrammatical features in text types that are not necessarily functional but may be "preferred because they are aesthetically valued" (2009: 16).

5. Data and methodology

5.1 Corpus-based research

Our study of the (changing) distribution of ACs across registers in ModE and PDE is corpus-based. For EModE and LModE, two Penn Corpora of Historical English were used: the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (PPCEME; 1500–1710; 1,737,853 words) and the *Penn Parsed Corpus of Modern British English* (PPCMBE; 1700–1914; 948, 895 words), respectively.[12] Additional texts came from (i) a small poetry corpus we compiled ourselves (82,867 words for EModE and 81,951 words for LModE), as this register is absent from the PENN corpora, and (ii) direct speech excerpts totalling 211,037 words from the Old Bailey corpus (Huber et al. 2012), which we treated as representative of LModE (near-)spoken language. 3480 ACs were retrieved for EModE, 241 of which were *with*-augmented, and 2153 ACs for LModE, 475 of which were *with*-augmented. Instances from the Penn corpora were retrieved making use of the corpora's own parsing system, which singles out ACs as a separate type of construction. Hence, the number of false hits was limited to the occasional parsing errors. Retrieval from the self-compiled poetry corpus and from the Old Bailey Corpus was manual.

For PDE, ACs were retrieved from the *British National Corpus* (BNC; period 1985–1994) as well as from the *Leuven Drama Corpus* (1969–1971).[13] Since these corpora had no specific parsing for ACs, retrieval was manual by reading extensive excerpts from either corpus; this resulted in a total of 3,611,088 words for PDE containing 3,984 ACs, 1,760 of which were *with*-augmented.[14]

5.2 Register categories

As Biber & Conrad (2009: 10) point out, registers can be identified on various levels of specificity, whereby there is not one correct level, but rather, where the specificity of register categories depends on the goals of the study at hand. The register categories for the present study, then, meet the following concerns. First of all, register categories will not be too specific, so that they represent sufficiently large amounts of text material to allow valid generalizations (see Biber & Conrad 2009: 11), as well as statistically significant analyses.

Secondly, "because a register analysis seeks to characterize a variety of language – not a particular text or an individual writer's style – it must be based on analysis of a sample of texts

[12] Note that the overlap of ten years between the EModE and LModE period is due to an overlap in the corpora themselves.

[13] Drama texts from the *Leuven Drama Corpus* were added to the selections from the BNC, as the latter only contained one relevant drama text.

[14] Making use of the part-of-speech tagging of the BNC would only have allowed broad searches (e.g. noun phrase + *-ing* form); this would have resulted in a disproportionately high number of spurious hits (over 90%), which would be even higher if ACs that have one or more elements in between the subject and predicate were to be included. Further, while slow, this approach has the advantage of offering a better understanding of the context of each AC and the precise nature of each text type.

selected to represent the register as fully as possible" (Biber & Conrad 2009: 10). This principle was adhered to when manually selecting texts from the BNC. For example, for the written register 'fiction', texts were selected representing various subgenres and intended audience levels; that is, high-brow literature as well as detectives and romances were included. For spoken English, this approach translated into the incorporation of texts from each subtype of spoken language offered in the BNC. With respect to the Penn corpora, the compilers' selection of texts per register was relied on as representative. Penn's register categories were, however, re-assigned to the categories used in the present study (see below).

Thirdly, since our text data were taken from various corpora, a corpus-specific register categorization was avoided; rather, our categorization was set up such that text data with the same characteristics (but possibly assigned to different register categories across corpora) would be subsumed under the same category label.

With these general considerations in mind, the following eight register categories were used: drama, science and handbooks, religion, fiction, law, narrative non-fiction, poetry, spoken language. All categories except the last one are produced in the written mode.

5.2.1 Drama

Drama is a "speech-purposed" text type "designed to be articulated orally" (Culpeper & Kytö 2010: 17). As its origin is in writing, it takes up a position in between speech and writing. For ModE, this category consists of the texts in the Penn corpora from the 'drama, comedy' section. The PDE texts contain one play from the BNC and several texts from the KU Leuven drama corpus. The texts selected include stage directions. Note that in keeping with the speech-related nature of this text type, no drama texts were included for PDE whose English was unusually archaic or formal.

5.2.2 Science and handbooks

For ModE, this category consists of the text types 'handbook', 'science, other', 'science, medicine' and 'educational treatises' from the Penn corpora, while for PDE it comprises the different types of academic texts of the BNC including texts on arts, humanities (with the exception of historical accounts), medicine, natural science, social science and engineering. This category is admittedly broad, but all texts can be subsumed under the label 'academic prose', in that they can be characterized as written language that has been carefully produced and edited, addressed to a large number of readers who are separated in time and space from the author, and with the primary communicative purpose of presenting information about some topic (Biber & Conrad 2009: 32).

5.2.3 Religion

Texts dealing with religious issues include, for ModE, the bible texts and sermons from Penn, as well as its philosophy section; because of their Latin-based tradition and Christian orientation,

philosophical texts were considered to be more similar to the religious texts than to any other category. For PDE, all texts marked by the BNC as 'religious' were included (their topical variety is, however, higher than in Penn).

5.2.4 Fiction

The characteristic shared by the texts in this category is that they tell a story of sorts. According to Biber & Conrad (2009: 138), fiction is one of the most complex register varieties "because the author must create a fictional world and can choose to describe that world from many different possible perspectives". For ModE, this category contains the 'fiction' section of the Penn corpora; for PDE, a selection was made from BNC texts labelled 'w_fict_prose', making sure that different subgenres and audience levels were equally represented.

5.2.5 Law

For ModE, this register category contains mostly statutes (i.e. the 'law' category from Penn). For PDE, it consists of various types of legal texts and documents such as decisions in the House of Lords, the Privy Council, the Supreme Court of Judicature, Assize Courts and Ecclesiastical Courts and textbooks/handbooks dealing specifically with laws and regulations -- all are texts with a high intended audience level.[15] In general, legal discourse is highly specialized, often containing archaic formulations.

5.2.5 Narrative non-fiction

This text category consists of texts that have the primary communicative purpose of narrating certain events such as: historical accounts,[16] newspaper reports, biographies, travelogues, diary entries, letters and non-business related emails.[17] For ModE, this means that the following Penn categories were incorporated: 'Biography, autobiography', 'Biography, other', 'Diary, private', 'History', 'Letters, non-private', 'Letters, private', 'Travelogue' and the 'Trial proceedings', which in Penn are rather narrative and descriptive in nature. For PDE, the various subsections of the 'newspaper' (w_newsp) category from the BNC were taken up, as well as the category 'biography', historical texts from the category 'w_non_ac_humanities_arts', emails and personal and professional letters. What these texts share is that they all make frequent use of narrative linguistic features such as past tense verbs, third person pronouns, adverbials of time and place etc. (Biber & Conrad 2009: 150).

[15] As indicated by the BNC annotations; we selected these texts to maintain the homogeneity of the text type.
[16] It may be surprising that this subtype is not subsumed under 'science and handbooks', but it has been observed that textbooks in disciplines with a focus on the past (i.e. especially history) rely heavily on narrative discourse (Biber & Conrad 2009: 244). Hence these texts fit in better with the category 'narrative non-fiction'.
[17] Letters were first looked at separately, but their use of ACs did not differ substantially from the other texts in this category. Hence, they were grouped with them.

5.2.6 Poetry

Poetry is characterized by the fact that the physical arrangement of text on the page is part of the creative effect and that meaning relationships are often constructed from the physical juxtaposition of words and lines, rather than through the use of complete sentences (Biber & Conrad 2009: 20). As the Penn corpora do not contain a poetry section, we compiled our own small poetry corpus, which consists of work by twenty-one different authors for EModE and fifteen different authors for LModE. In so doing, we were careful to select a variety of subtypes such as odes, hymns and sonnets. For PDE the 'poetry' section of the BNC was used.

5.2.7 Spoken language

For LModE, this category consists solely of the sections of direct speech (indicated by special tags in the annotation), taken from the Old Bailey corpus.[18] For PDE, this category contains samples of the various spoken language subcategories in the BNC.[19] As such, in spite of their sharing the same mode or channel, the texts in this category are rather varied. Still, this seems unproblematic in that spoken language, however varied, shares a set of linguistic features which sufficiently sets them apart from the written mode (see Biber and Conrad 2009:245, 262).

Tables 1 and 2 provide a word count by text type for each period.

Register	**Number of words EModE**	**Number of words LModE**
Religious writing	310,725	115,728
Fiction	112,438	65,626
Law	115,621	65,748
Narrative non-fiction	754,972	417,463
Science and handbooks	334,019	204,992
Drama	110,078	70,338
Poetry	82,867	81,951
Near spoken English	/	211,037

Table 1: Word count by register for the EModE and LModE period

[18] The fragments considered are from the years 1733, 1755, 1777, 1800, 1841 and 1881.

[19] This includes broadcasts (discussions, documentary and news), classroom English, consults, conversations, courtroom language, demonstrations, interviews, lectures on various topics, meetings, parliament discussion, public debates, sermons, scripted and unscripted speeches, live sports and tutorials.

Register	Number of words
Religious writing	931,123
Fiction	469,583
Law	344,408
Narrative non-fiction	743,684
Science and handbooks	479,355
Drama	159,777
Poetry	142,234
Spoken English	340,924

Table 2 :Word count by register for the PDE period

5.3 Factors determining ACs' register distribution

We then categorize the registers just discussed in terms of the dimensions/factors proposed in the literature (see Section 3) as determining the AC's (changing) register distribution. These are:

- formal vs. informal
- narrative vs. non-narrative[20]
- literary/depictive vs. non-literary/non-depictive

Quirk et al. (1985: 26) define formal language use as proceeding from speakers formal (i.e. relatively stiff, cold, polite, impersonal) attitude to the hearer, the topic or the purpose of communication; conversely, informal language use proceeds from an attitude which is relatively relaxed, warm, rude, or friendly. Actually, they recognize a gradient in attitude between formal and informal, with neutral language use in between. On this view, the register categories 'law' and 'science and handbooks' represent the most formal categories, while 'spoken language' represents the most informal category. Admittedly, the degree of formality within spoken language is not constant, but spoken language is still generally less formal than written language because, as Quirk et al. (1985: 25) state, "writers tend to [write] more concisely as well as more carefully and elegantly than they may choose to speak".

Narrative texts can be defined as those texts that are in some respect telic in nature in that they 'tell a story' structured along the line of a progressing event (with a starting point and a more or less defined end point). Circumstantial information such as the causes or goals of certain actions are provided in varying degrees of detail, and actions are situated in time and space. Examples of narrative register categories are 'fiction' and various types of 'narrative non-fiction': biographies (which tell the

[20] While the dimensions 'narrative vs. non-narrative' and 'depictive vs. non-depictive' play an important role in Kortmann's (1991, 1995) discussion of ACs, they have not been carefully defined. In our definitions, we have therefore relied on the way these notions were operationalized in Kortmann's (1991, 1995) studies.

story of someone's life), letters (which tell about events in someone's life), newspaper reports (which report on important ongoing or recent events) and historical accounts (which retell historical events). Poetry is not regarded as a narrative register because the descriptive detail it provides about contexts, moods and feelings is primary to any narrative detail (even in narrative types of poetry).

Finally, literary texts are essentially depictive in nature, in that they invoke a made-up world in all its aspects for readers to reconstruct in their imagination. Texts of this type contain a high level of descriptive detail encoded through longer than average sentences displaying a considerable variation in vocabulary and syntax. On this definition, fiction and poetry can be subsumed under the heading 'literary'. Note that drama texts, while in essence a literary genre and hence 'part of literature', have not been classified as 'literary'; because they essentially consist of direct speech (in addition to concise stage directions), and as such are farther removed from the characteristics typical of depictive/literary language use.

With this information in mind, we are now able to classify each of the register categories in terms of the dimensions discussed; this classification is represented in Table 3.

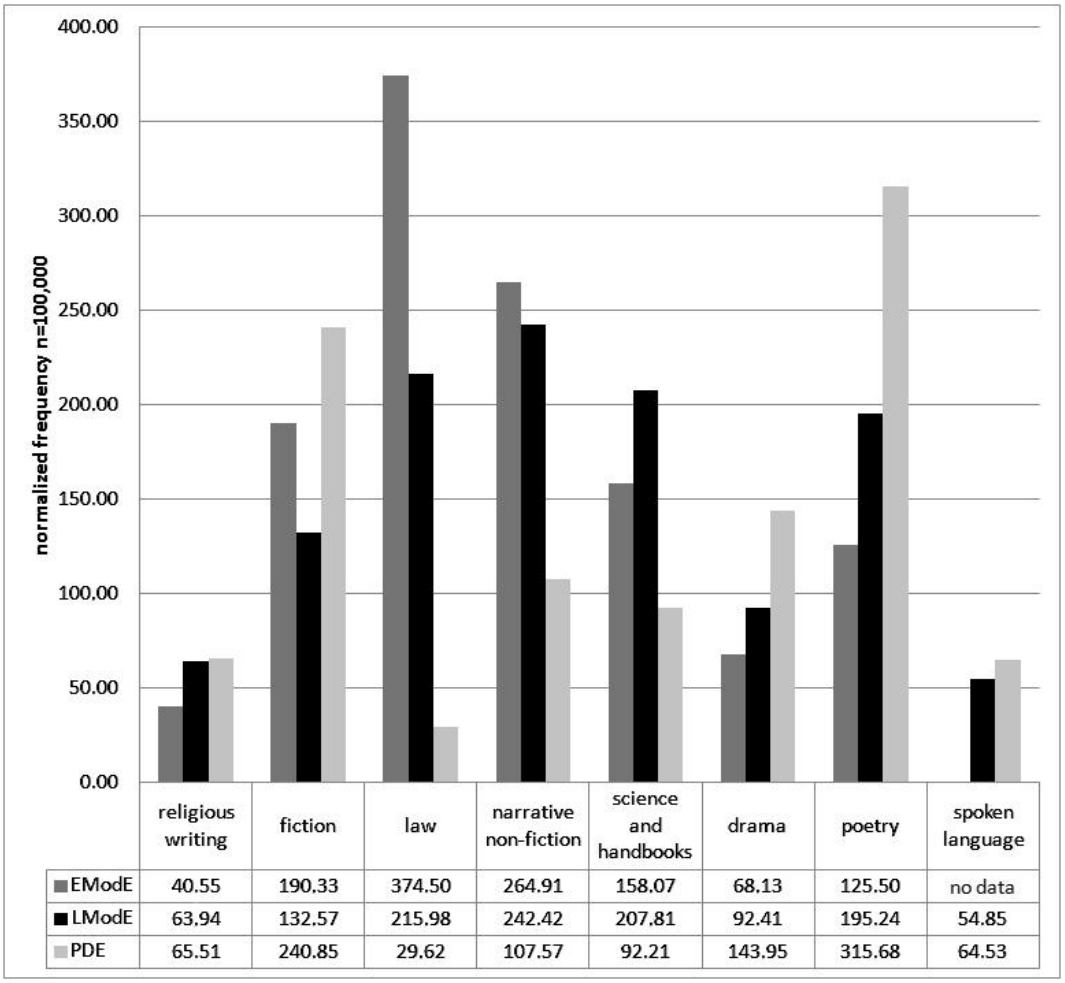
Register	**Degree of formality**	**Narrative or non-narrative**	**Literary or non-literary**
Religious writing	Medium	Non-narrative	Non-literary
Fiction	Medium	Narrative	Literary
Law	High	Non-narrative	Non-literary
Narrative non-fiction	Medium	Narrative	Non-literary
Science and handbooks	High	Non-narrative	Non-literary
Drama	Low	Non-narrative	Non-literary
Poetry	Medium	Non-narrative	Literary
Spoken English	Low	Non-narrative	Non-literary

Table 3: Classification of register categories in terms of dimensions proposed as accounting for ACs' register distribuiton

6. The results

6.1. Factors influencing the AC distribution

Let us first take a look at Figure 1, which presents an overview of the number of ACs (both augmented and unaugmented variants) per register for EModE, LModE and PDE.



	religious writing	fiction	law	narrative non-fiction	science and handbooks	drama	poetry	spoken language
EModE	40.55	190.33	374.50	264.91	158.07	68.13	125.50	no data
LModE	63.94	132.57	215.98	242.42	207.81	92.41	195.24	54.85
PDE	65.51	240.85	29.62	107.57	92.21	143.95	315.68	64.53

Figure 1: The distribution of ACs (both augmented and unaugmented) across the various registers in EModE, LModE and PDE (frequencies are normalized per 100,000 words)

In identifying the factor(s) responsible for the (changing) distribution of ACs, we will, per period, investigate the importance (weight) of each of the dimensions in terms of which the register categories can be characterized (degree of formality, degree of narrativeness, literary character (see above)). Change, then, can be read off from a comparison of the periods.

How do we investigate the importance of a factor/dimension? We will examine the distributional behaviour of ACs across the individual register categories; as well, we will examine their distributional behaviour in terms of aggregate figures.

If a dimension is crucial in explaining AC frequency in a particular period, each of the register categories subsumed under one value of that dimension will ideally have a higher/lower AC frequency than the categories subsumed under the complementary value of that dimension. For instance, for the value 'formal' (i.e. high/medium formality) to significantly correlate with (or, predict) high AC frequency in a particular period, the register categories labelled as 'formal' will each have a higher AC frequency than the register categories labelled as 'informal' (low formality). Let us check if this is

indeed the case for EModE and PDE – we will focus on EModE and PDE to facilitate diachronic comparison.

In EModE, except for the register category 'religion', each of the high/medium formality categories has a higher AC frequency than the low formality one ('drama'). The category 'religion' is an exception because, being a (medium) formal category, it has the lowest AC frequency. In PDE, the picture is less clear-cut: four categories of high/medium formality ('religion', 'law', 'narrative non-fiction', 'science and handbooks') have a lower AC frequency than the low formality one 'drama'. This does not necessarily mean that low formality is the condition favouring higher AC frequency, because the formal categories 'poetry' and 'fiction' each have higher AC frequencies than 'drama'.

What this suggests is that, in EModE, high/medium formality indeed predicts high AC frequencies across registers, but that this predictive power has substantially decreased in PDE ($p<0.001$). The aggregate figures in Figure 2 confirm this:[21] while the high/medium formality categories in EModE show a normalized frequency of 199.05, the low formality one has 68.13. In PDE, these figures are respectively 113.62 and 89.87; in other words, while in EModE, there is a marked preference for ACs to occur in high/medium formality registers, in PDE ACs are distributed far more evenly between formal and informal registers. This is further corroborated by Figure 3, which breaks up AC frequency data into the three levels of formality presented in Table 1. As Figure 3 shows, while in EModE, high formality register categories outranked medium and low formality ones, in PDE, they showed the lowest AC frequency (66.03 versus 89.87 and 130.76 for low and medium formality registers, respectively).[22]

[21] The aggregate figures in Figures 2–5 have not been computed by averaging the normalized AC frequencies of the register categories subsumed under a particular dimension (formality, narrativeness, literariness), but they have been calculated afresh; that is, by adding up the raw frequencies of the ACs occurring in the relevant register categories of a particular dimension, and normalizing to 100,000.

[22] Importantly, spoken English in PDE not only contains more ACs than one would expect based on the available literature (Kisbye 1971: 43; Quirk et al. 1985: 1120) but the ACs in this register category are also almost equally productive as in the written registers (94% of the spoken ACs are productive, versus 96% of the written ones for PDE as based on a preliminary count using MI scores).

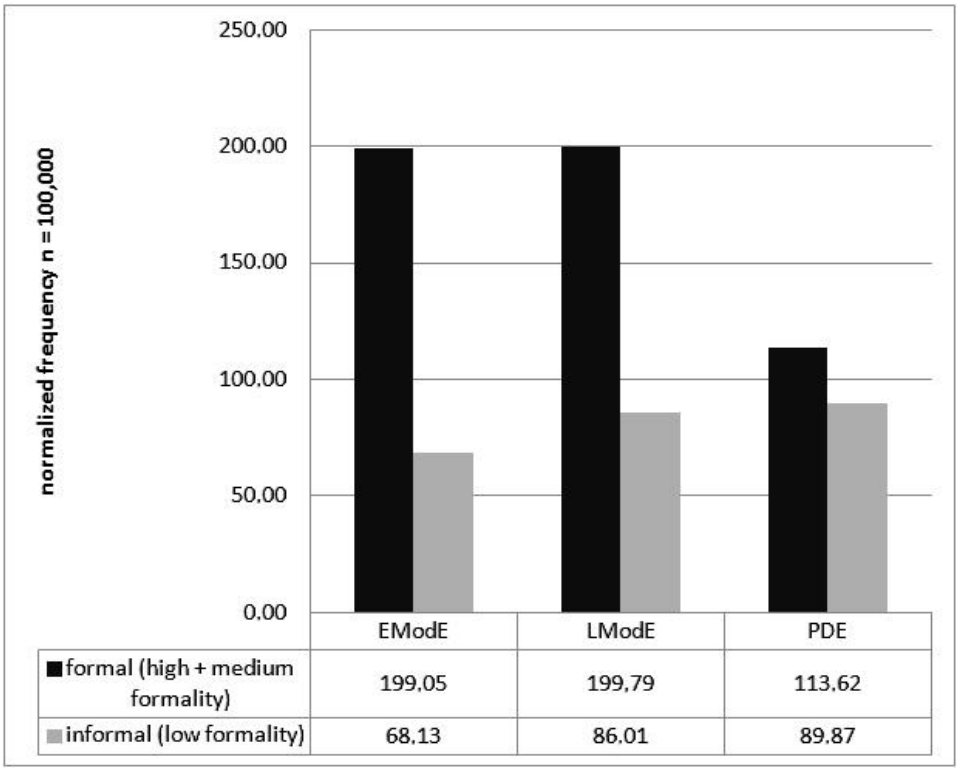


Figure 2: AC frequency across formal and informal registers

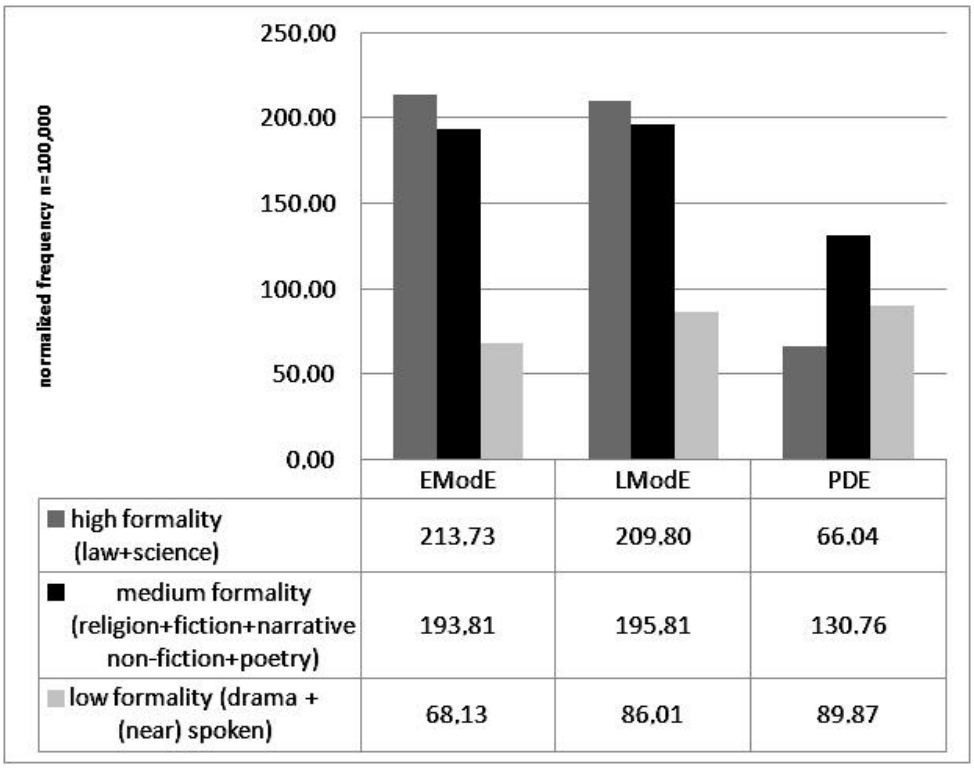
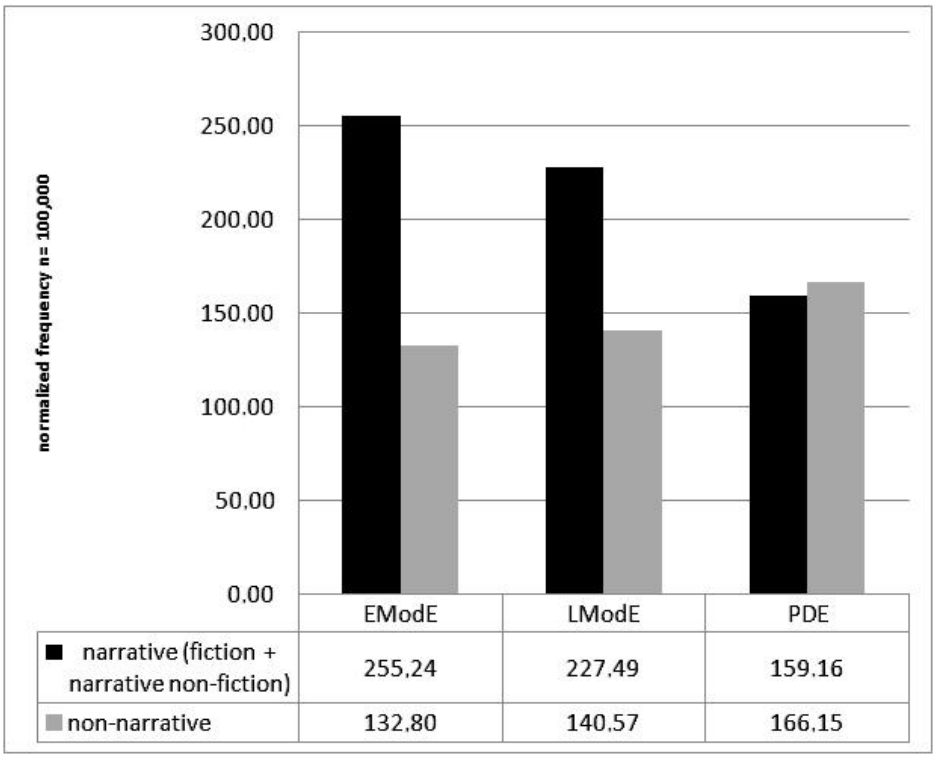


Figure 3: AC frequency by registers' degree of formality: more detailed breakup

Let us now consider the dimension 'narrativeness'. In EModE, the narrative registers ('fiction' and 'narrative non-fiction') each show higher AC frequencies than the non-narrative categories (except for 'law', which has the highest AC frequency of all). In other words, as with high/medium formality, an important correlation can be observed between high degree of narrativeness and high AC frequency. In PDE, the picture is again less clear: 'narrative non-fiction' shows a lower AC frequency than several non-narrative categories (drama, poetry);[23] 'fiction', on the other hand, has a higher AC frequency than most non-narrative registers (except poetry).[24] In other words, both narrative registers seem to be going in opposite directions. These observations are, again, in keeping with the aggregate figures. For EModE, Figure 4 shows a markedly higher AC frequency in the narrative registers than for non-narrative ones, while ACs in PDE narrative registers and non-narrative registers are almost evenly distributed. This change is statistically highly significant, $p<0.001$.



	EModE	LModE	PDE
narrative (fiction + narrative non-fiction)	255,24	227,49	159,16
non-narrative	132,80	140,57	166,15

Figure 4: AC frequency across narrative and non-narrative registers

[23] In fact, Figure 1 shows that both 'narrative non-fiction' and 'science and handbooks' show a decline in AC frequency. This evolution not only reflects the decreasing frequency of ACs in formal registers in general, but may also be linked to the gradual loss of depictive/literary qualities observed in each of these register categories (which, in recent times, have employed a more objective and neutral writing style in relating true information or true events).

[24] The somewhat surprising dip between EModE and PDE (see Figure 1) may be related to the personal style of the authors included in the respective corpora. Indeed, when comparing the fiction texts within the fiction category, substantial differences in AC frequency emerge between authors. This suggests that AC frequency should not only be solely linked to register but also to personal stylistic preferences. For example, the BNC excerpt from the fictional text 'Coffin in fashion' (39,364 words) contains 67 ACs, i.e. a normalized frequency of 170.2 per 100,000 words, whereas in the excerpt from 'The Prince of Darkness' (44,495), 181 ACs are attested: a normalized frequency of 406.8, more than double that of the other text.

Finally, let us consider the dimension 'literariness'. In EModE, AC frequencies of the literary categories 'poetry' and 'fiction' are superseded by those of several non-literary categories ('law', 'narrative non-fiction'). In PDE, however, AC frequencies for each of the literary categories are higher than any of the other, non-literary, categories. Turning to the aggregate figures (Figure 5), we can observe that while literary and non-literary registers had an almost even distribution in EModE, the dimension 'literariness' has become predictive of the distribution of ACs in PDE, in that the value 'literary' significantly correlates with high AC frequency ($p<0.001$).

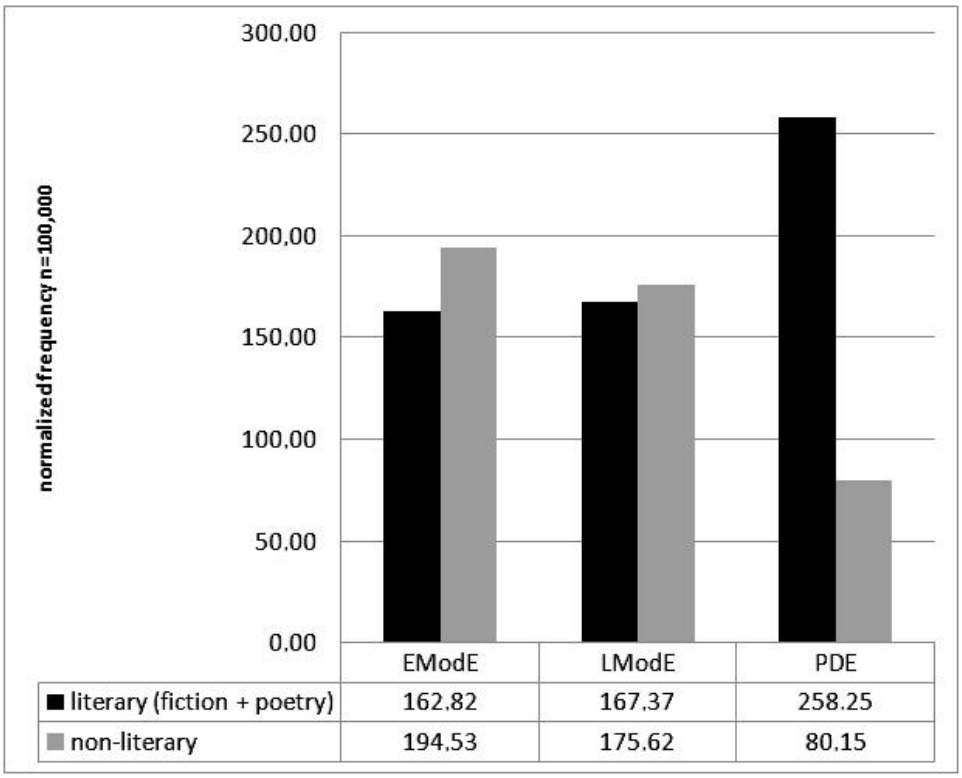


Figure 5: AC frequency across literary and non-literary registers

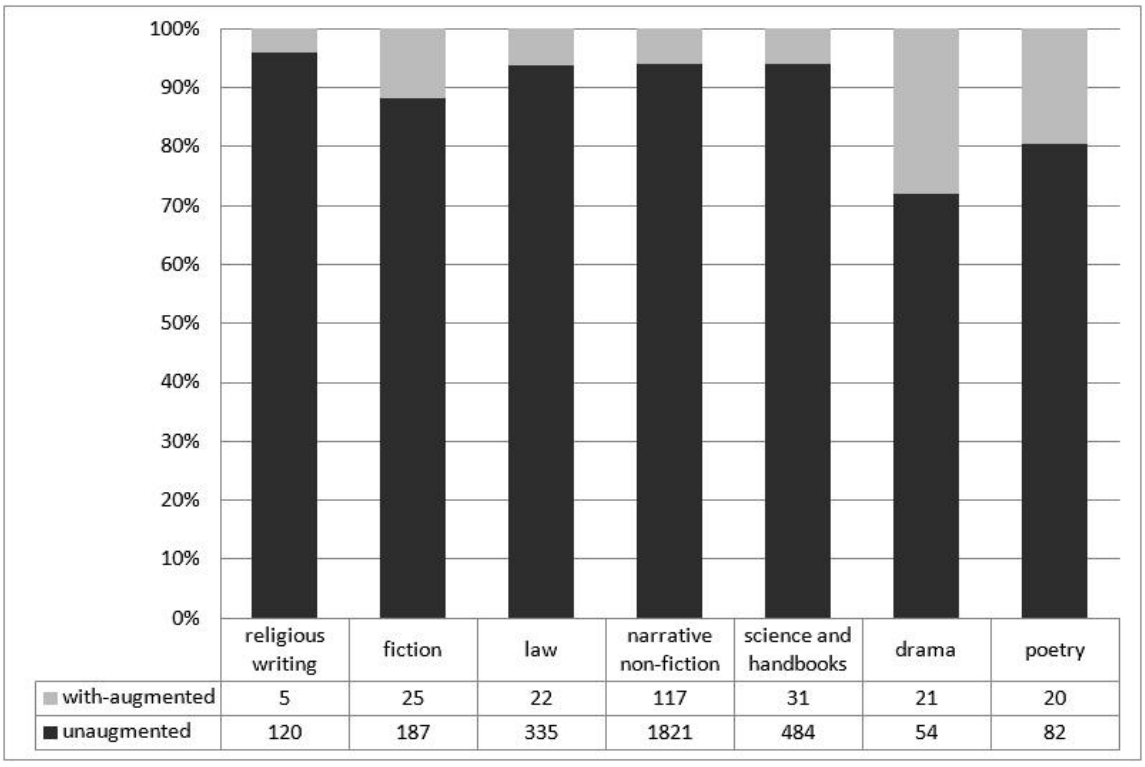
In EModE, the dimensions 'formality' and 'narrativeness' each have a value ('high/medium formality' and 'narrative', respectively) favouring high AC frequency, and can thus be said to be good predictors of AC distribution. The dimension 'literariness' shows a (largely) balanced AC distribution, and therefore cannot predict whether an AC is likely to occur in the literary or in the non-literary registers. In PDE, the dimension/factor 'literary vs. non-literary' is clearly the one that best predicts AC distribution as the value 'literary' correlates with high AC frequency. Further, when comparing the three dimensions, we can observe that in EModE, the dimension 'formality' is a better predictor of AC distribution than 'narrativeness' because ACs in high/medium formal registers assume 74.5% of all ACs, while ACs in narrative registers only take up 65%; these proportions are, of course, substantially higher than in the 'literariness' dimension, where ACs are more or less evenly distributed over the two values (45.56% vs. 54.44%). In PDE, however, the distribution of ACs is best predicted by the 'literariness' dimension, with the condition 'literary' assuming 76.31% of all ACs.

We can conclude that the factors determining the distribution of ACs across register categories have clearly changed over the years. In EModE, this distribution can most reliably be captured in terms of the dimension 'formality', and in the second instance, also in terms of the dimension 'narrativeness': ACs occur 2.92 times as frequently in registers of high/medium formality as in low formality registers; ACs in non-narrative registers are outranked by narrative registers by a factor of 1.92. In PDE, AC distribution can best be predicted in terms of the dimension 'literariness': ACs in literary categories outrank those in non-literary categories by a factor of 3.22.

6.2. Augmentation versus register

In this section, we attempt to establish whether there exists a correlation between the frequency of augmented ACs in a text and the register category the text belongs to.

Let us first consider Figure 6, which details the distribution of augmented and unaugmented ACs across the various registers in EModE. For all register categories combined, unaugmented ACs (89%) far outnumber *with*-augmented ACs (7%)[25]. Note that *with*-ACs are somewhat more common in the text types 'fiction' (12%), 'poetry' (20%) and 'drama' (28%). This relatively higher frequency of *with*-ACs in 'drama' seems to suggest a preference for (near-)spoken discours[26].



	religious writing	fiction	law	narrative non-fiction	science and handbooks	drama	poetry
with-augmented	5	25	22	117	31	21	20
unaugmented	120	187	335	1821	484	54	82

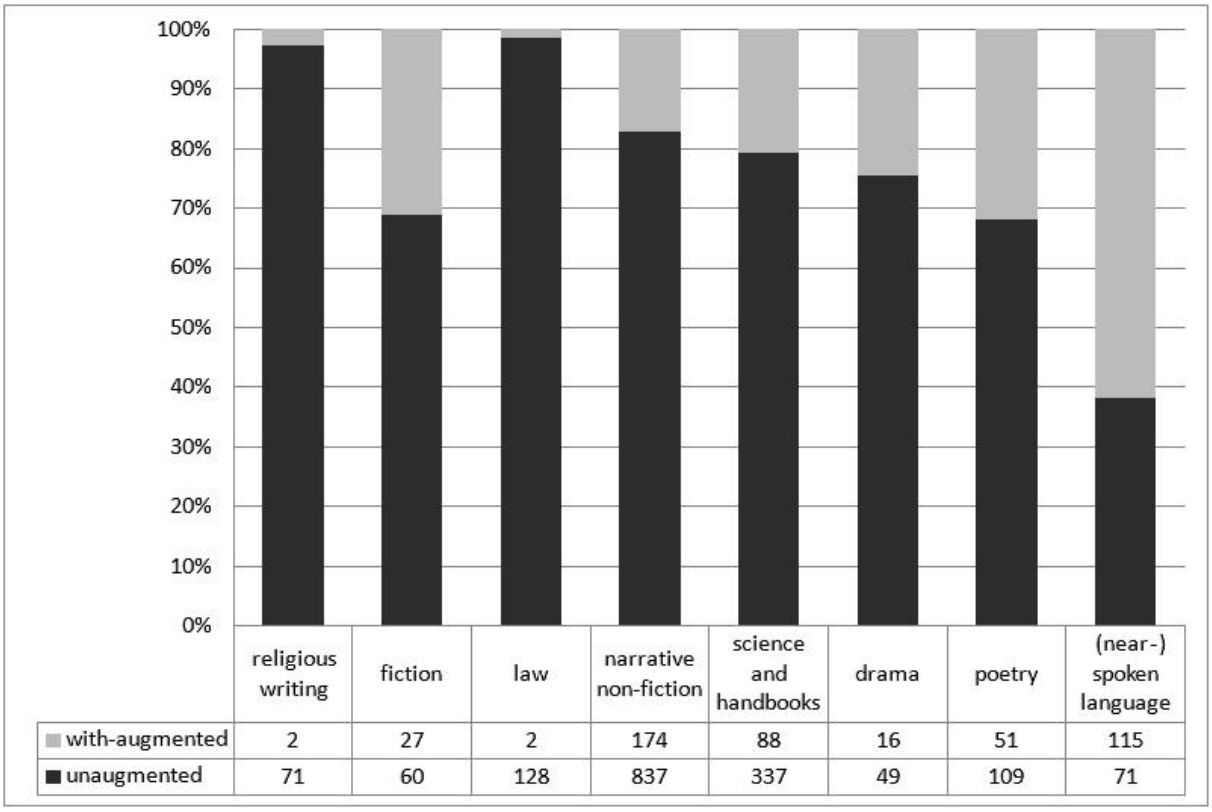
Figure 6: The distribution of *with*-augmented and unaugmented ACs across register categories in EModE[27]

[25] The remaining 4% consist of augmented ACs with an augmentor different from *with.*

[26] 77% of the EModE ACs in the register category 'drama' were attested in speech excerpts.

[27] As other types of augmented ACs (i.e. those with an augmentor other than *with*) represent only a minority of the data (together they account for about 4% of the ACs in EModE and less than 1% of the ACs in LModE), they are not included in Figures 2–4.

By LModE (Figure 7), *with*-ACs have gained in frequency (from 7% of the total number of ACs in EModE to 22% in LModE; $p<0.001$), but are still outnumbered by unaugmented ACs in every written register category. As in EModE, the written categories 'drama' (23%), 'fiction' (31%) and 'poetry' (32%) are the ones with the highest relative proportion of augmented ACs. In keeping with the relatively higher incidence of *with*-ACs already observed in EModE speech-purposed drama texts, *with*-ACs are significantly more frequent ($p<0.001$) in the direct speech excerpts from the Old Bailey Corpus than in written English and make up almost 62% of the ACs attested in this register.



	religious writing	fiction	law	narrative non-fiction	science and handbooks	drama	poetry	(near-) spoken language
with-augmented	2	27	2	174	88	16	51	115
unaugmented	71	60	128	837	337	49	109	71

Figure 7: The distribution of *with*-augmented and unaugmented ACs across register categories in LModE

By PDE (Figure 8), the share of *with*-ACs has, again, considerably increased ($p<0.001$ in the accompanying χ^2-test, from a 22% share of all ACs to a 44% share). Surprisingly, 'poetry' (26%) and 'fiction' (25%), two of the text types with the highest overall AC frequency in PDE (Figure 1), and the highest share of augmented ACs in ModE (Figures 6 and 7) show, in PDE, the strongest preference for the prototypical unaugmented variant.

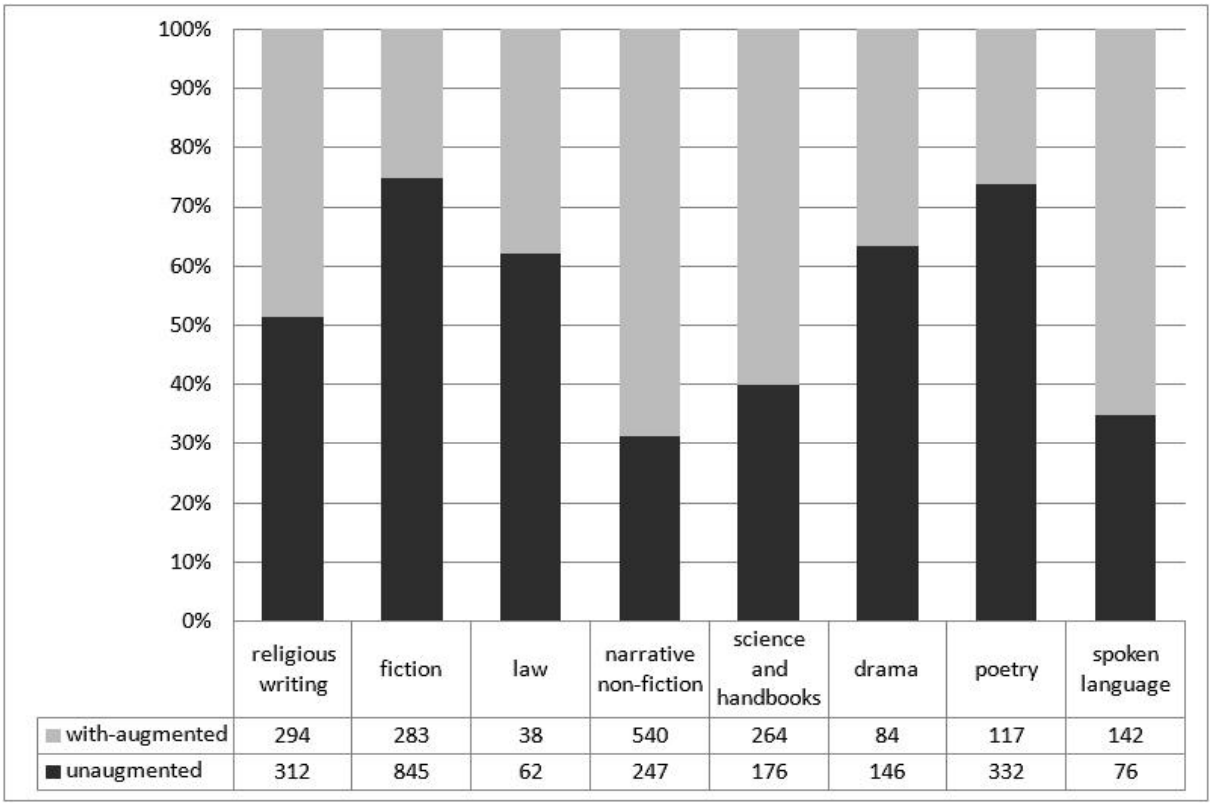


Figure 8: The distribution of *with*-augmented and unaugmented ACs across register categories in PDE

The hypothesized preference for augmented ACs in spoken language use (Section 4) is again borne out by the PDE data: augmented *with*-ACs take up a share of 43% of all ACs in the written varieties, while they take up 65% in the spoken register (Figure 9). The accompanying χ^2-test, moreover, reveals that the observed bias for augmentation in the spoken language is highly statistically significant ($p<0.001$) despite being slightly less marked than in LModE (where *with*-augmented ACs take up 18% of all ACs in written language versus 62% in (near-)spoken language (Figure 10)). The comparably high frequency of augmented ACs in spoken language can be readily explained when keeping in mind that augmented ACs can be processed more easily than unaugmented ACs. Indeed, the augmentor, the AC's introductory preposition, establishes a clear syntactic link with the matrix clause, almost functioning as a conjunction (Berent 1975, Kortmann 1995). This additional syntactic clarity is especially useful in spoken language where speakers cannot simply return to a previous part of the discourse when something has not been properly understood.

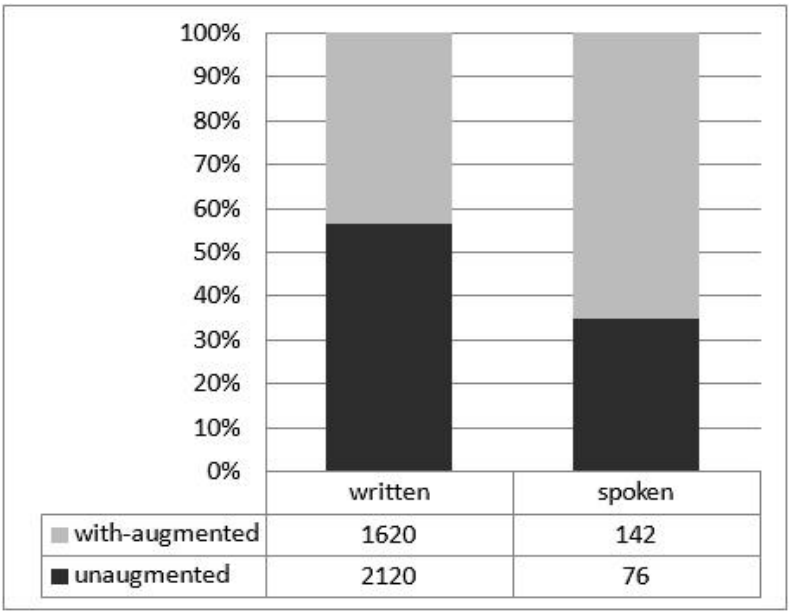


Figure 9: The distribution of *with*-augmented and unaugmented ACs across written and spoken language in PDE

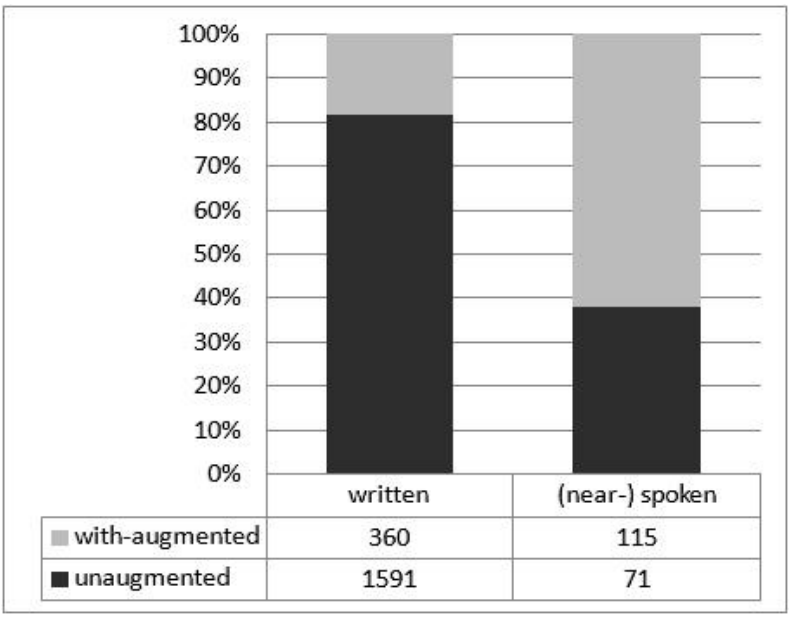


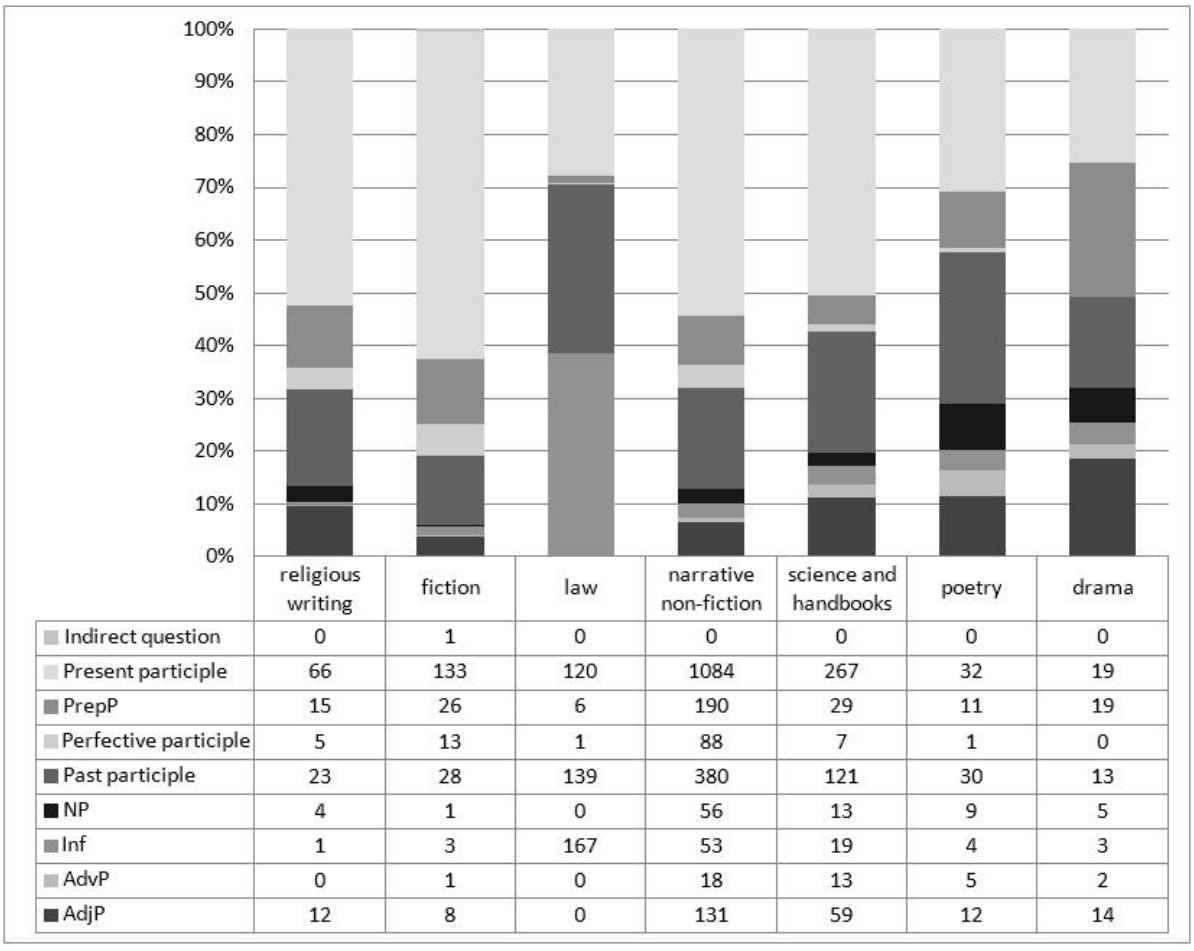
Figure 10: The distribution of *with*-augmented and unaugmented ACs across written and spoken language in LModE

6.3. The register distribution of predicate types

When considering the distribution of the different predicate types across the various registers, we can observe that most EModE text types (Figure 11) display a clear preference for present participle predicates (almost 50% of all ACs). Past participle predicates (21%) are the second most frequent structural type. This result is not particularly remarkable since present and past participles are the

oldest types of AC predicates in English,[28] and as such of all subtypes the most entrenched. In addition, the preference for present participle predicate ACs may have been further intensified because of similarity with other *-ing*-constructions such as gerunds and free adjuncts (Kohnen 1996: 169) which were gaining in frequency in EModE.

Another striking observation is the high frequency of infinitive predicate ACs in the register category 'law'. Whereas infinitive predicates are relatively infrequent in all the other registers (3%), this predicate type constitutes a large proportion of the ACs for 'law' (40%) and is, not unexpectedly, its highest frequency predicate type. As this type of AC is seldom used in other registers and appears rather formulaic and old fashioned, its high frequency in legal texts is probably due to the rather archaic and highly formal nature of the language use in this text type. This result underscores Kortmann's (1988: 67) remark that ACs with infinitive predicates are heavily stylistically marked in comparison to the other structural varieties.

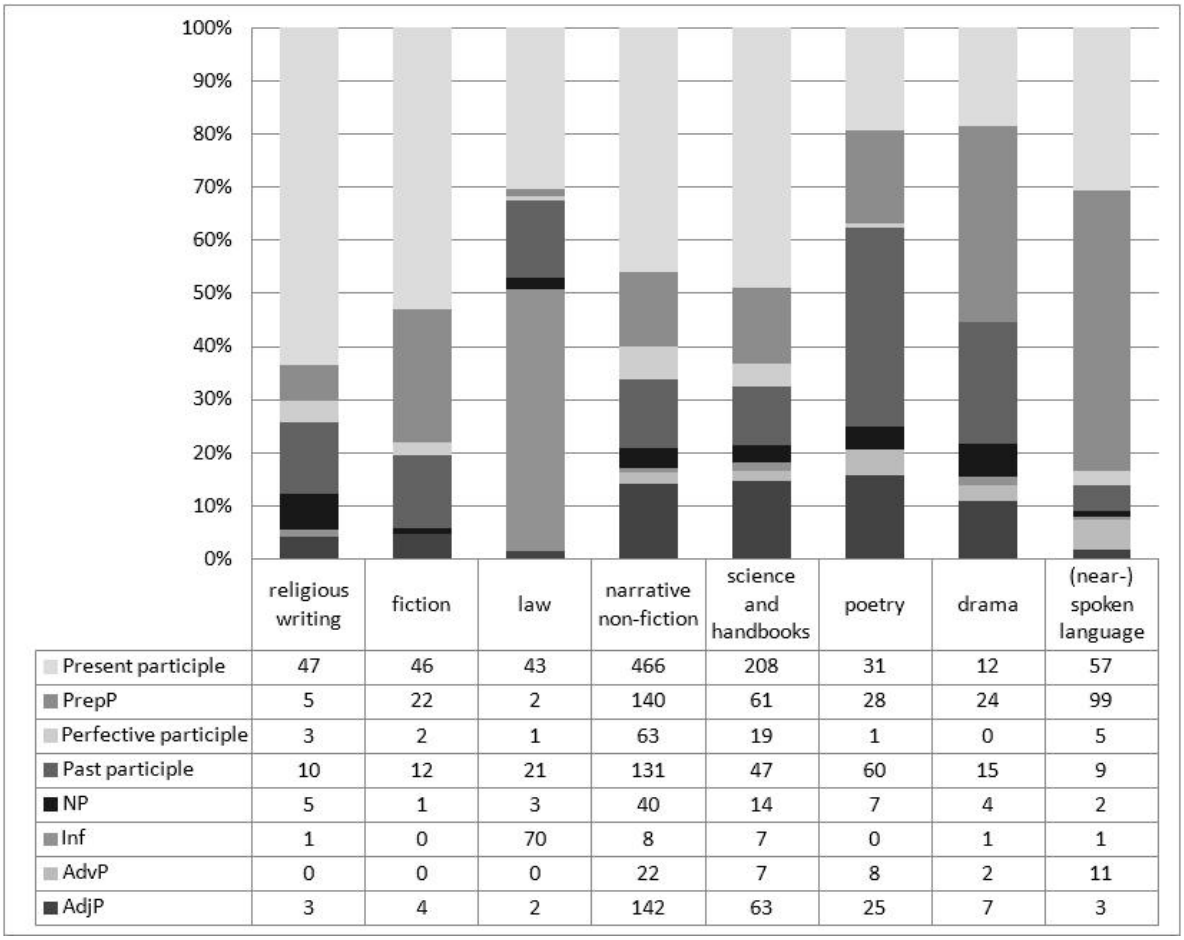


	religious writing	fiction	law	narrative non-fiction	science and handbooks	poetry	drama
Indirect question	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Present participle	66	133	120	1084	267	32	19
PrepP	15	26	6	190	29	11	19
Perfective participle	5	13	1	88	7	1	0
Past participle	23	28	139	380	121	30	13
NP	4	1	0	56	13	9	5
Inf	1	3	167	53	19	4	3
AdvP	0	1	0	18	13	5	2
AdjP	12	8	0	131	59	12	14

Figure 11: Distribuiton of different predicate types of ACs across the various register categories in EModE

[28] Only present participle predicates and past participle predicates have been attested for the Old English period (Mitchell 1985: 918).

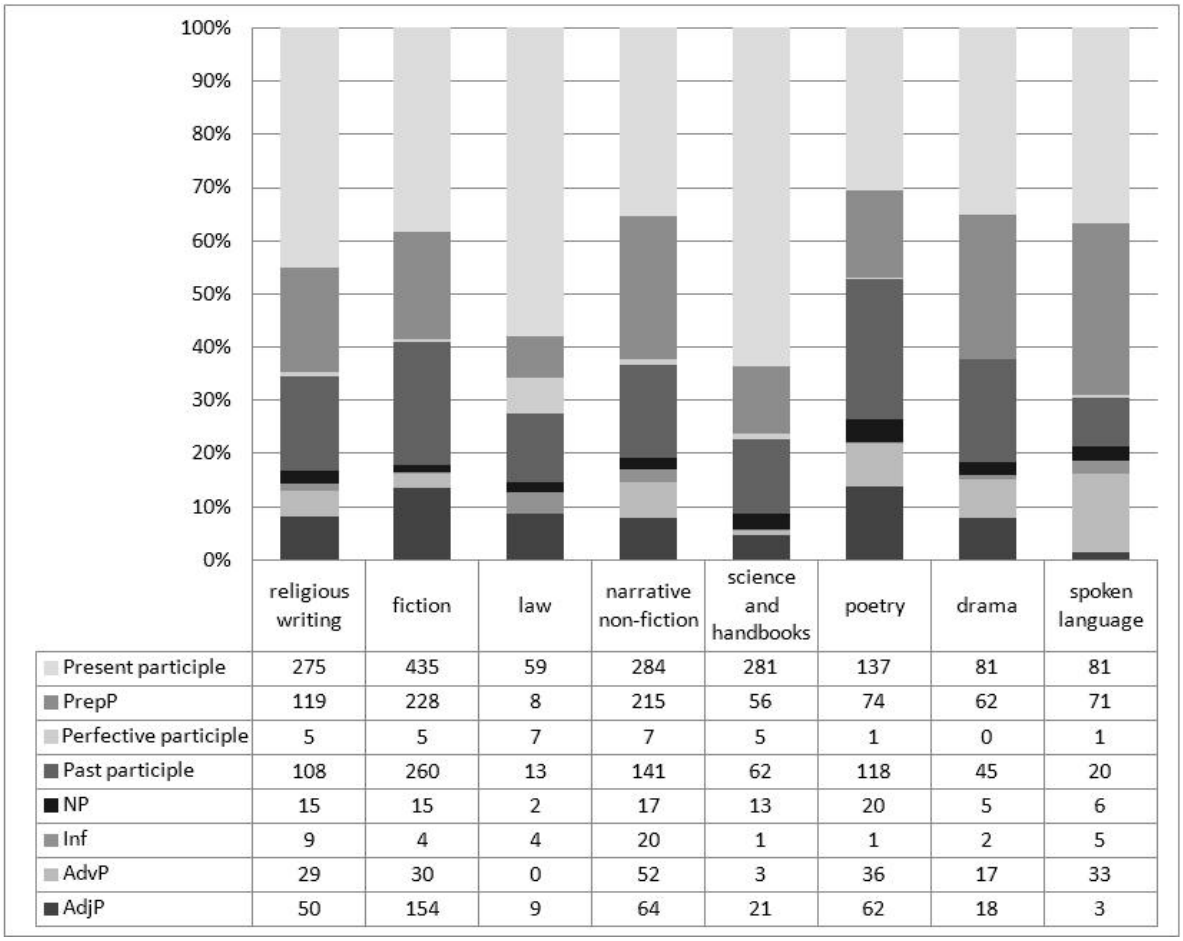
In LModE (Figure 12), a drastic reduction of past participle predicates occurred in the register category 'law' (from 32% in EModE to 17% in LModE), so that infinitive predicates became even more prominent (their share increased from 39% in EModE to 49% in LModE). Prepositional phrase predicates gained ground in most registers (their overall share increased from 9% in EModE to 18% in LModE). The distribution of ACs across the other predicate types remains rather stable (compared to the EModE period).



	religious writing	fiction	law	narrative non-fiction	science and handbooks	poetry	drama	(near-) spoken language
Present participle	47	46	43	466	208	31	12	57
PrepP	5	22	2	140	61	28	24	99
Perfective participle	3	2	1	63	19	1	0	5
Past participle	10	12	21	131	47	60	15	9
NP	5	1	3	40	14	7	4	2
Inf	1	0	70	8	7	0	1	1
AdvP	0	0	0	22	7	8	2	11
AdjP	3	4	2	142	63	25	7	3

Figure 12: Distribuiton of different predicate types of ACs across the various register categories in LModE

In the PDE period (Figure 13), present participles retain their position as most frequent predicate type (50%). In addition, while all previously available predicate types are still in use, infinitive predicates underwent a statistically highly significant decrease in frequency ($p<0.001$). As a very large portion of the ACs of the text variety 'law' are precisely these highly stylistically marked infinitive ACs, the dramatic decrease in frequency of infinitive predicates may be immediately connected to the steep decline in AC frequency for this register (Figure 1). The overall frequency of prepositional phrase predicates has increased slightly further (18% to 21%).



	religious writing	fiction	law	narrative non-fiction	science and handbooks	poetry	drama	spoken language
Present participle	275	435	59	284	281	137	81	81
PrepP	119	228	8	215	56	74	62	71
Perfective participle	5	5	7	7	5	1	0	1
Past participle	108	260	13	141	62	118	45	20
NP	15	15	2	17	13	20	5	6
Inf	9	4	4	20	1	1	2	5
AdvP	29	30	0	52	3	36	17	33
AdjP	50	154	9	64	21	62	18	3

Figure 13: Distribuiton of different predicate types of ACs across the various register categories in PDE

We can conclude that the distribution of predicate types across the various registers of English is rather stable over time. A marked preference for present participle predicates remains constant across all three periods (49%, 42% and 50% respectively) and only prepositional phrase predicates show a noticeable increase in relative frequency over time (from 8% over 18% to 21%). The only predicate type that displays a distinct connection to a specific text type is the infinitive predicate, which used to be highly common in ModE legal texts but is rarely used in the other registers. In PDE, this predicate type occurs seldom (1%). This connection to the register category 'law' makes infinitive predicate ACs the only type of AC that can be specifically associated with highly formal and stylistically marked language use across all three periods.

7. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the preceding analysis. Whereas in the OE period, the AC appears to be mostly limited to learned, Latinate contexts, it has diffused to all the written text types in the periods investigated, as well as to the spoken language. However, the paths of diffusion have not remained constant over time. In EModE, the distribution of ACs across register categories is

best predicted by the dimensions 'formality' and 'narrativeness'. In particular, formal and, in the second instance, narrative registers are seen to favour high AC frequency (conversely, informal and non-narrative registers correlate with low AC frequency). On the other hand, the distribution of ACs across literary and non-literary registers is fairly balanced, and thus neither literary nor non-literary registers seem to particularly favour, or disfavour, ACs. By PDE, distribution patterns have substantially changed: whereas in EModE, the dimension 'literariness' did not show a preference for ACs to occur in a particular register, it is now the literary registers, along with the medium formal ones, which most clearly favour ACs, and thus best predict the distribution of ACs. Then again, the 'narrativeness' dimension has become less successful as a predictor, in that it shows a balanced distribution of ACs across its registers.

Regardless of these general tendencies, important differences in AC use can be observed between the authors within a single register in the same period. This is an indication that the frequency of ACs in a given text is probably also to a considerable degree dependent on personal stylistic preferences. Further, the gradual increase of ACs in drama texts over the three periods and the presence of ACs in PDE spoken language, show that even though the AC is first and foremost a feature of written English, it is more prominently present in informal and or spoken language than can be expected based on the literature (which still largely assigns ACs to the written language). Indeed, the very fact that ACs occur in speech, which is the basic mode of communication and unlike writing an inherent part of the abilities that define us as human beings (Biber & Conrad 2009: 260), means that ACs can be considered a thoroughly ingrained part of our grammar.

W*ith*-augmentation was shown to be overall on the increase (from a mere 7% of all ACs in EModE to 44% in PDE) and a feature typical of spoken English. Indeed, augmentation may have been the trigger needed for the construction to fully establish itself in the spoken register, as the augmented variant is often considered the more easily processable of the two AC types (Berent 1975, Kortmann 1995).

With regard to the distribution of predicate types over the different registers, the only striking feature was the comparatively high frequency of infinitive predicate ACs in legal texts. In all other registers, except for drama, and across the three periods, present participle predicate ACs are by far the most frequently used subtype (49%, 42% and 50% in each of the three periods, respectively). In addition, the AC maintained its structural versatility in that no predicate types were lost over time.

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